

Week Ending Friday, August 11, 1995

The President's Radio Address

August 5, 1995

Good morning. Today I'm at the Children's Inn at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland, with young patients and their families, some of whom are guests of the inn. For them, the Children's Inn is home while their children get well. The inn is built on a simple premise, that even with the best doctors, medicine, and technology, no treatment is complete unless it includes the family.

Children know that better than anyone, that it's their mothers and fathers who carry them through the tough times. And that's true for all of us. But we all know, too, that our families all across America are going through tough times today. Right now, our families are feeling real pressure. Too many are working harder for less. Too many are afraid of losing their jobs or their retirement or their health care. Too many live in fear that their children are exposed to violence and drugs.

We have to do what we can to strengthen our families and to help them through these changing times. That's what we did with the very first law I signed as President, which took effect 2 years ago today. It's called the Family and Medical Leave Act. It could be called the working family protection act. Under this law, if you get sick, if your child gets sick, or your parent needs medical care, you can take time away from work without losing your job. Sometimes this time off can be the most important time in a family's life. It can also be the toughest time. But it would be a lot tougher if the family couldn't face it together.

If you know a family who's needed to use this leave, you know why it's so important. I know some of these families, and three of them are here today. Kenny Weaver, a Texas petroleum worker, took guaranteed leave to be with his daughter, Melissa. Diane Atwood

of Little Rock, Arkansas, needed leave to fight her own battle with Hodgkin's disease. J.C. Shardo of Atlanta needed to take a leave when her brother Swartz needed her by his side when he became ill. Because of this law, families in crisis can be together, and the breadwinners need not fear they'll lose their jobs.

The family and medical leave law is good for our families and it's good for our businesses because it allows our people to be both good parents or good children or good siblings and good workers. It supports family stability and family responsibility.

I want to make sure that if you're eligible for guaranteed leave, you know about it. As many as 50 million Americans are eligible, and as many as 3 million people a year may need to use it. If you work in the public sector or in the private sector for an employer who employs 50 or more people, you qualify to apply for a leave of 12 weeks for family or medical reasons.

The U.S. Labor Department has backed the claims of thousands of workers who were denied leave or fired when they tried to use this law. That's illegal. We'll protect your rights and the rights of your family. This law shows that we, as a nation, can value families through the choices we make together.

We've got a lot of other family choices to make in the weeks and months ahead. This week the Senate finally will take up welfare reform, which is also all about helping people become good workers and good parents. We've reached agreement on requiring teen mothers to live at home and stay in school, requiring parents to pay the child support they owe or work off what they owe. Now we need a bipartisan agreement that requires people on welfare to work but makes sure they get the child care they need to stay off welfare for good and to be good parents.

Family values are a big part of our national budget. Two years ago, our national budget reduced the deficit; that's good family values.

But we increased the number of children in Head Start, we provided for immunizing all our children under 2, we made college loans more affordable and easier to repay, we increased tax relief for working parents, and we increased job training. We need to build on that family agenda, not tear it down.

The congressional majority seems to be determined to cut back on programs that advance our family values. How can you talk about family values in one breath, and in the next, take Head Start away from 50,000 poor children or cut back college loans and grants for students who need and deserve them or cut back worker training for people who are unemployed? But all that happened in the House of Representatives this week. They call it change. I say it shortchanges America's families in the fight for the future. This vote is antifamily, and I won't let it stand.

It's not too late to build a legacy—to build on the legacy of family leave. We ought to invest in education, invest in our families, raise the minimum wage, target tax relief to raising children and educating them, protect the Medicare of our seniors, and protect the right of people to keep their health insurance if they change jobs or if someone in the family gets sick. These are the kind of things that are worthy of the legacy of family leave. We have to work hard so that we know that our families will be better off, so that we can make tomorrow better than today for every family.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Children's Inn at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, MD.

Proclamation 6814—National Child Support Awareness Month, 1995

August 5, 1995

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

Providing for our children is one of humanity's worthiest and most fundamental endeavors. Children are the best part of ourselves—the sum of our past and the promise of our future, the guarantee that our lives

and values and dreams will flourish long after we are gone. Sadly, however, many parents in our country today deny the instinct to care for their children, failing to provide even the most basic economic support. Millions of America's children have no legally identified father. Millions do not receive the financial support they need to lead secure and healthy lives.

Because of these harsh realities, I have made the reform of our Nation's child support system one of the top priorities of my Administration. The welfare reform plan that I proposed to the Congress last year contains the toughest child support enforcement measures in America's history—measures that would improve the effectiveness of procedures for establishing paternity, make it easier to enter and update child support awards, and dramatically strengthen our ability to enforce payment of those awards. My proposals would also give us the ability to track deadbeat parents across State lines, suspend their driver's licenses if necessary, and make them work off what they owe.

As the Nation's largest single employer, the Federal Government must take a leadership role in the effort to ensure that all of America's children are properly supported. In February of this year, I signed an Executive order requiring Federal agencies to cooperate fully with measures to establish and enforce child support orders and to inform employees of how they can meet their support obligations. Additionally, we are encouraging State and local governments to develop innovative approaches to helping families cope with child support issues, and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has begun to restructure and strengthen its partnerships with State child support agencies.

This month we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Child Support Enforcement Program at HHS. This program—at the Federal, State, and local levels—has been instrumental in giving hope and support to America's children while fostering strong families and responsible parenting. Through their efforts, over 5.1 million children now have a legally recognized father; more than 11.7 million children with a parent living outside of their homes have a legal right to the financial sup-